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BAND 31
1999

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Paleolithic Artifacts from Cham-e Souran, Islamabad Plain, Central Western Zagros Mountains, Iran

By Fereydoun Biglari, Teheran and Kamyar Abdi, Ann Arbor*

A surface occurrence of possible Paleolithic artifacts was found during the first season of archaeological research in the Islamabad Plain¹. Our survey of the plain included reconnaissance in small peripheral plains and valleys. One of these peripheral areas is the Siyekhor Plain, leading from the Islamabad Plain to a longitudinal valley extending about 15 km to the north to the mountains of Kamaleddin, Korkor, and Bilahar with a maximum elevation of around 2,000 m above sea level (Fig. 1).

In the juncture of the Souran and Islamabad Plains, about 5 km ENE of the town of Islamabad and 2 km NW of the village of Siyekhor, on July 6, 1998, the team geomorphologist, Saman Heydari found a small chopping tool (Fig. 2.5) on the left bank of the seasonal river of Cham-e Souran, a major tributary of the Ravand River. As the significance of this single find became immediately obvious, we returned to investigate the area around the findspot a few days later. An area of approximately 150 × 20 m on the stream bed and adjacent terraces at an elevation of around 1,350 m above sea level were surveyed for surface remains. The surveyed area was recorded and given a designation (ID 51: Cham-e Souran; N 34°, 7' 750 E 46°, 34' 792).

Finds from the First Season, 1998

In that short revisit to the site, we found four more artifacts, all more or less patinated and rolled (Fig. 2). Nos. 1-2, 4-5 are of a crypto-crystalline silicate with fine to matte fracture surfaces, reddish (10R3/1-2, 10R4/3-4) in color, and No. 2 has greenish-gray (5Y3/1) bedding as well. This is the so-called 'radiolarian chert' of the Zagros used in many periods for making stone tools. One item (Fig. 2.3) is of a fine banded tan (10YR6/2) and cream (10YR7/2) chert, also widespread in the Zagros. All are small in size and range in maximum length from 23.1 to 58.7 mm. The curvature of the cortex on one piece of the red chert (No. 5) indicates that relatively small cobbles, 4-6 cm in diameter, from streams were the source for these artifacts. Nonetheless, they need not have come from extant streams, as the Pliocene 'Bakhtiari Conglomerate' of the Zagros and various more recent Pleistocene gravels have plenty of usable cobbles and pebbles in them.

The artifacts we collected at Cham-e Souran in our first season (Fig. 2) include:

(1) A flake with clear bulb and platform remnant. This is part of a Levallois flake with a faceted platform. Prior to its removal, three blade-like flakes were removed from

* We would like to thank John D. Speth and Henry T. Wright for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this paper.

¹ The first season of archaeological research in the Islamabad Plain was carried out in summer 1998. In our first season we focused on three main objectives: a full-coverage survey of the Islamabad Plain (Abdi 1999), and documenting an unknown part of the regional sequence by means of a stratigraphic cut at Chogha Gavanch – the site with the longest history of Holocene occupation in the Plain (Abdi n.d.). The second season was carried out in autumn 1999. In the second season we continued our survey of the Plain, as well as test excavations at Chogha Gavaneh (Abdi, 2000).

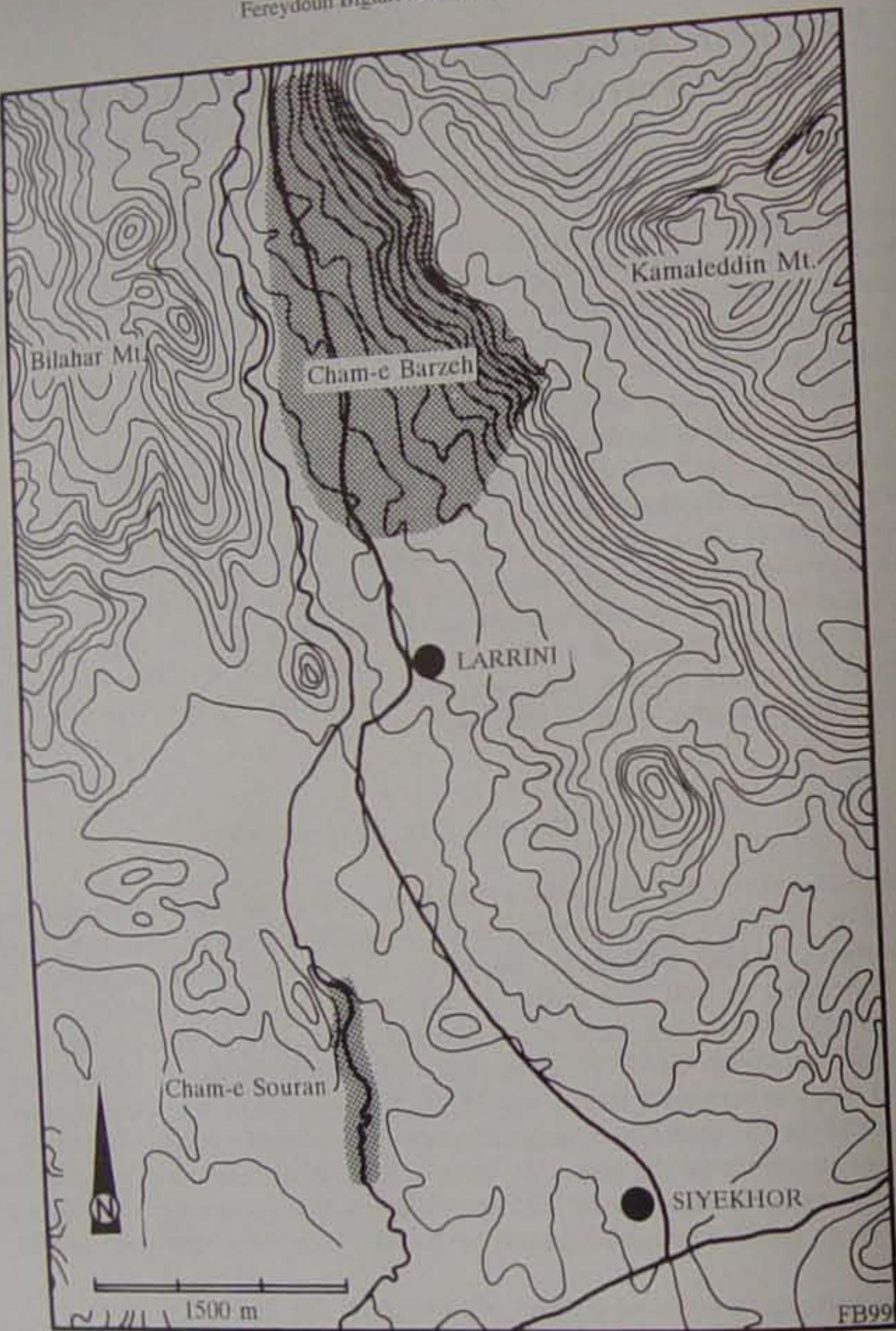


Fig. 1. General map of Siyekhor Plain, showing the location of Cham-e Souran and Cham-e Barzeh flint scatters.

the same platform. Then another flake was struck from the opposite end of the core, hinging at the distal end of this flake. Finally this flake was struck, removing a remnant at one end of the core. There are traces of possible retouch or geological crushing on the left side. Size $28.8 \times 27.8 \times 11.1$ mm. Weight 9.39 g.

(2) An end-notched flake. This is probably part of a flake from a prepared core, though not necessarily Levallois strictly defined. The tiny platform remnant may be faceted. Size $34.9 \times 28.9 \times 12.4$ mm. Weight 12.02 g.

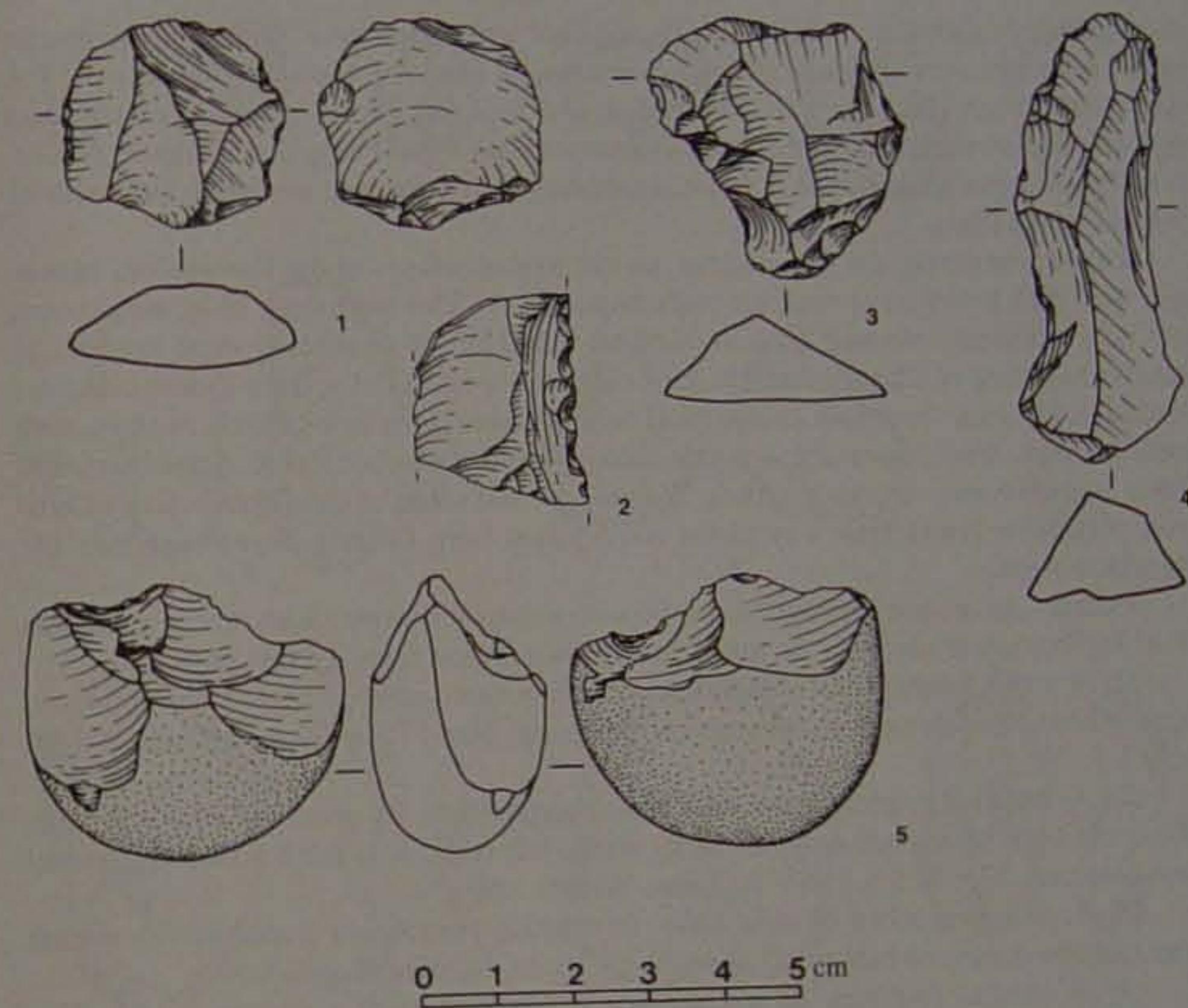


Fig. 2. The Cham-e Souran Artifacts (First season, 1998)

(3) Probably a retouched natural flake or a core trimming flake. It comes from a large piece, perhaps a tubular fragment from an outcrop rather than a river cobble. Size $58.7 \times 22.4 \times 13.1$ mm. Weight 16.25 g.

(4) A denticulated blade segment with no sign of sickle sheen. It is interesting that it is a blade with the scar of a normal longitudinal flake on the left and the scar of a flake driven from the side on the right. It is probably a blade from a Levallois blade core. Size $27.3 \times 23.1 \times 5.7$ mm. Weight 3.74 g.

(5) A chopping tool or small core with bifacial flaking along one edge with cortex preserved elsewhere. The cutting edge shows possible evidence of use. But, like those noted for Nos. 1 and 2, these traces may have resulted from geological crushing. Size $40.9 \times 34.6 \times 22.7$ mm. Weight 32.38 g.

Finds from the Second Season, 1999

We returned to the site in our second season in 1999 and surveyed a larger area along the Souran River. The closest known source of chert to Cham-e Souran is on the western slopes of the Kamaleddin Mountain, about 4 km to the north. Cherts are mostly from the Eocene Shahbazan Formation and occur as nodules ranging in size from 5 to 30 cm in

dimension². Nodules are mostly coarse, medium gray chert and fine, translucent tan chert. Both types are common in lithic assemblages from the north and northeast of the Islamabad Plain. There are also fine reddish and fine dark brown cherts as cobbles and pebbles along various limestones and sandstones within the Paleocene Kashkan Formation³. These types are common in lithic assemblages from the east, southeast, and south of the Islamabad Plain.

Further surveying the general area, on the western slopes of the Kamaleddin Mountain we found a very large open-air workshop (Fig. 1). This workshop, in an area known as Cham-e Barzeh, covered an area of about 3,500 m². We collected some samples at various localities at Cham-e Barzeh. This collection consists of a flake industry and retouched tools made from both chipped and natural flakes. It includes mostly notches, with some piercers, denticulates, a few burins, and inversely retouched flakes. Some retouched flakes resemble end- or side-scrapers. We suspect that some of the Cham-e Souran artifacts may have found their way to the river gravel from Cham-e Barzeh open-air site through erosion.

During our second season we collected a larger sample from Cham-e Souran (Fig. 3). They are made from the same chert as the artifacts from the first season.

(1) A small hinging flake-blade struck from a unidirectional core. There are some signs of retouch or damage on the edges of this piece. Size 17.6 × 7.9 × 12.5 mm. Weight 0.5 g.

(2) A broken Levallois flake with radial preparation. Its proximal end is broken. There are signs of retouch or wear on its distal, left edge. It is from a multidirectional Levallois core. Size 19.9 × 13.6 × 10.2 mm. Weight 1.60 g.

(3) A small retouched or used flake. Its striking platform is faceted, with its left edge near the distal end broken off. Size 19.1 × 15.3 × 5.2 mm. Weight 1.30 g.

(4) A medial fragment of a flake. It is probably from a prepared core. Size 21.4 × 19.2 × 6.1 mm. Weight 2.21 g.

(5) A broken flake. Its distal end is retouched inversely and its striking platform is plain. It is struck from a unidirectional core. Size 25.5 × 26.8 mm. Weight 6.90 g.

(6) A retouched flake removed from a bi-directional core. Its bulb of percussion is pronounced and may have been detached by hard-hammer technique. Size 42.7 × 28.9 × 10.9 mm. Weight 11.42 g.

(7) A flake with its ventral face retouched at the distal end. Its striking platform is plain and it is struck from a unidirectional core. Size 32.5 × 28.3 × 10.1 mm. Weight 4.60 g.

(8) A broken blade reminiscent of an Aurignacian blade. Its lateral edges are damaged. Its striking platform was faceted. Size 36.1 × 13.8 × 10.2 mm. Weight 2.60 g.

(9) A semi-cortical core trimming flake with dihedral butt, probably from a nodular chert which is abundant at the structural ridge of Kamaleddin Mountain to the north of the locality. At the distal end there is some scar which reminds one of notching. This piece probably comes from the large open-air site of Cham-e Barzeh to the north. Size 44.6 × 35.0 × 19.2 mm. Weight 29.23 g.

(10) A denticulated scraper. It is made of a natural flake, and like No. 9 it probably comes from Cham-e Barzeh. Size 49.8 × 39.1 × 11.1 mm. Weight 22.41 g.

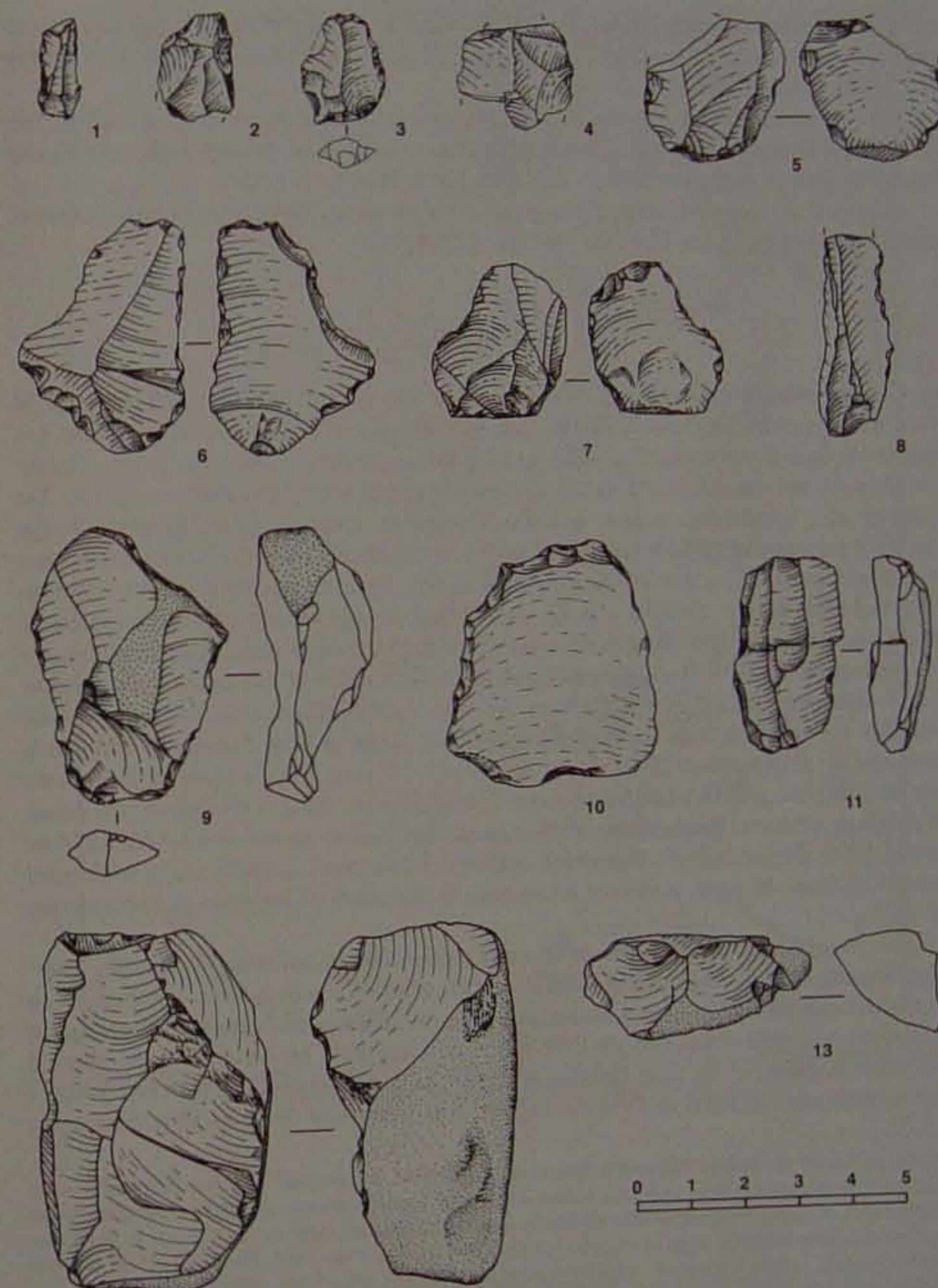


Fig. 3. The Cham-e Souran artifacts (Second season, 1999)

² Field notes by S. Heydari 1999.
³ Field notes by S. Heydari 1999.

(11) A semi-chipped bladelet core. Its cortex is preserved on one side. It is made from a reddish chert nodule and chipped from a single platform. Size $39.6 \times 19.0 \times 15.3$ mm. Weight 8.60 g.

(12) A unidirectional core made from a nodular chert. Its cortex is preserved on one side. It was probably chipped using hard-hammer percussion. It may have come from Cham-e Barzeh as well. Size $67.8 \times 40.6 \times 36.2$ mm. Weight 121.50 g.

(13) A flake core with two flake scars. This piece also seems to be from Cham-e Barzeh. Size $41.6 \times 19.1 \times 19.7$ mm. Weight 12.10 g.

Conclusion

The Cham-e Souran collection does not seem to be a homogenous assemblage. It is mixed with typologically later artifacts such as bladelet and bladelet cores. It is also too small to be formally compared to other Paleolithic assemblages from the Zagros Mountains (Fig. 4), but some features in the collection underline its importance, especially the occurrence of a small core-chopper and some Levallois elements. Core-choppers always form an important part of later Lower Paleolithic assemblages from the Zagros Mountains especially Pal-e Barik, a possible late Acheulian site about 80 km SE of Cham-e Souran in the Hulailan Valley. The Pal-e Barik assemblage is characterized by the presence of similar core-choppers⁴ that comprise about one-third of the collection. Notched pieces are also common in the Pal-e Barik assemblage⁵ and many flake tools are made of thick natural and accidental flakes⁶. Core-choppers are also well represented in the possible late Acheulian assemblages from Barda Balka and Cham Bazar in Iraqi Kurdistan⁷ and Gakia to the east of Kermanshah⁸. In a recent re-survey of Gakia, a large open-air Paleolithic workshop, Biglari and Heydari found some core-choppers, along with flake tools, cores, and debitage products. Furthermore, during an archaeological survey of the Mehran Plain in early 1999, Biglari and G. Nokandeh collected some core-choppers along with other products at Amar Merdeg, a surface occurrence to the north of the town of Mehran (see Fig. 4).

The presence of Levallois pieces in the Cham-e Souran collection is another interesting feature. One of these pieces is blade struck from a Levallois core. These occur as late as the Levantine Ahmarian Industry⁹, and are well illustrated from the Mousterian of the Bisotun cave only about 100 km ENE of Cham-e Souran¹⁰, but have not been reported from other occurrences on river terraces and hilltops in the region, except Awi Kher, a flake assemblage collected in 1992 by Biglari from gravels of the Awi Kher (or Garab)

⁴ In the course of the Iranian Prehistoric Project in 1959–1960, the Oriental Institute team found some Acheulian handaxes and flake tools on a hilltop scatter near Gakia to the east of Kermanshah (Braidwood 1960, 1961). A recent re-survey of this locality by Biglari and Heydari suggests that Gakia is in fact a vast surface site, presumably a large quarry and workshop for making stone tools. Here Biglari and Heydari found a nearly complete range of morphological types including some cores, primary cortical elements, flakes, and debris fragments. Tools include one handaxe, some chopping tools, and other heavy-duty tools. Also there are some scrapers and denticulate notched flakes.

⁵ Mortensen 1993, Fig. 6.5.d

⁶ Mortensen 1993, Fig. 6.7.i–j.

⁷ Wright/Howe 1951; Braidwood/Howe 1960.

⁸ See footnote 4.

⁹ Marks/Kaufman 1983.

¹⁰ Dibble 1984.

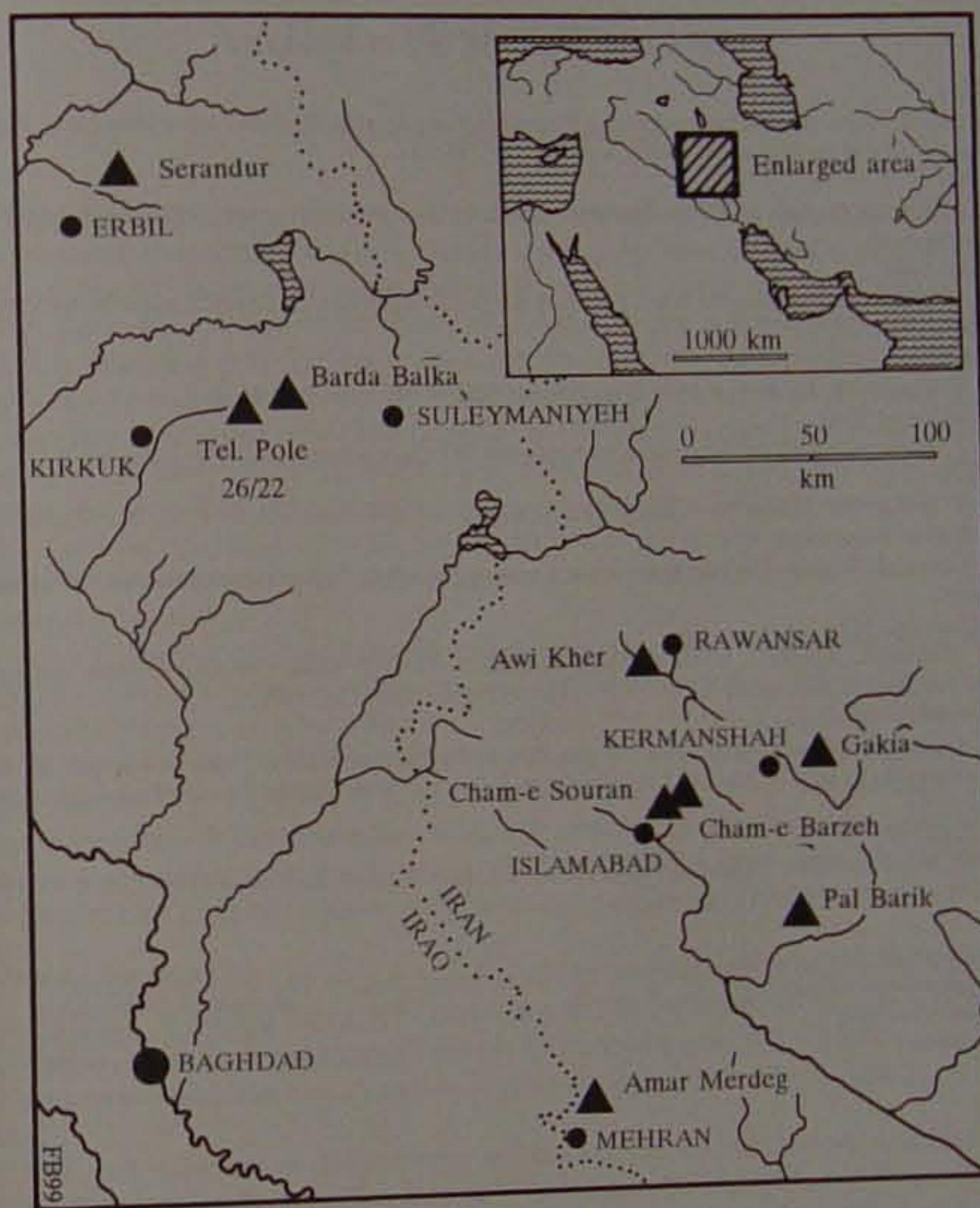


Fig. 4. General map of west central Iran, showing the location of Cham-e Souran and other open-air paleolithic localities found on river terraces and hilltops.

River, a western tributary of the Qara Su River about 40 km to the north of Cham-e Souran. This assemblage includes various retouched flakes, and like Cham-e Souran, and probably Cham-e Barzeh, consists of evidence for the use of the Levallois technique.

The Lower and Early Middle Paleolithic of the Zagros are poorly known. It is hoped that detailed studies of recent finds from Cham-e Souran and Cham-e Barzeh, and other finds from the Islamabad survey area (now under way) add to our knowledge of the earlier Zagros Paleolithic.

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Ancient rock art in Uzbekistan

By M. Khuzhanazarov, Samarkand

The rock drawings (petroglyphs) are one of the widely spread types of archaeological monuments of Uzbekistan. Today Uzbek archaeologists have studied about 140 monuments of rock art dating back to ten thousand years B.C., from the Mesolithic up to the Middle Ages. Rock art representations of Uzbekistan are concentrated mainly in the northwest to central part and the northeast of the country. Among them there are frequently monuments of ancient art, but there are many difficulties with their dating and it is not so easy to decipher them. The drawings are the most valuable source for the understanding of the inner world, art and culture of ancient people, their philosophy and aesthetic world. Also they are a valuable source for zoologists, because there are so many kinds of animals, depicted on rocks, that do not live in the area any more and are not met at present. They might be completely extinct or have left to other regions because of environmental conditions.

As it is known, the landscape of Uzbekistan consists of semi-desert, foothills and mountains. The vast territories of the east and central parts of the republic are covered by the mountain ranges of Altai, Western Tyanshan, the Hissar, Zaraphshan and Nurata. Even in the Kyzylkum, which is still known wrongly as periphery, desert mountains and gorges prevail (Fig. 1). Painted or engraved drawings or whole compositions may be found everywhere in the mountains on smooth surfaces, limestones, slate, granite, sandstone rocks, wherever it is possible to draw. The drawings are technically divided into two groups: rock paintings (drawn with paint) and petroglyphs (engraved on the rock surface).

Uzbekistan is very rich in petroglyphs, left by peoples and tribes, being inhabitants of the country in ancient times. It is interesting to note, that petroglyphs, as a rule, were engraved on rocks in deep gorges at secured picturesque places. Very often drawings of different epochs are found on smooth rock surfaces at the same places close to each other (Fig. 2).

The rock drawings of Zarautkamar are the earliest and the richest in terms of the compositions among the rock drawings of Uzbekistan. The site is located in the Kujitang mountains - southwestern spurs of the Hissar mountain range - in the Zarautsai gorge, 5 km to the south from the Kizil-Alma settlement. It was discovered in 1939 by the hunter I. F. Lomaev. The drawings are painted with red colour on walls of shelters and niches and were covered by sinter, which changed later into so called desert varnish. Scenes of hunting with wild bulls and gazelles and a fight of two hunter groups for the prey is presented in the three compositions of the Zaraut drawings. Most of the hunters are shown with camouflage clothes to come closer to the bulls (Fig. 3). Other people of Zarautsai are drawn schematically. In the scenes the hunters are armed with bows, boomerangs and perhaps axes. The bow in the hunter's hands is drawn as one or two parallel arcs, often with an arrow in the middle. Arrows are in the form of straight bars with two or three forks at the base and with a sharp point. Similar drawings of people, bows, arrows and animals are known among many monuments of the world.

The rock pictures of Zarautsai are dated to the Mesolithic, Neolithic and the Bronze Age epochs, and to medieval periods. The scenes shown in Zarautsai are reflecting hunter's life. Obviously, Zarautsai was a district of hunting and religious ceremonies, but